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SUBJECT: HONDURAN PRESIDENT IS SURPRISE GUEST IN COSTA RICA

REF: A. SAN JOSE-OPS CENTER TELECONS

[1](#)B. 6/28/09

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: President Manuel Zelaya, whisked out of Tegucigalpa early on June 28 under military guard, found himself a surprise guest in San Jose a few hours later. The GOCCR evidently was not advised in advance, and both Zelaya and President Oscar Arias made clear that the Honduran was not seeking, nor had been granted political asylum. Strongly condemning the military action against Zelaya, and calling for a swift, democratic resolution, Arias publicly invited his counterpart to travel with him to Managua on June 29 for the previously-schedule Central American Integration System (SICA) summit. Arias also announced that the GOCCR, to assume the rotating SICA presidency on July 1, was urging all Rio Group members to attend the Managua event, in order to address the Honduran situation on a broader, hemispheric basis. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. A NOT-SO-QUIET SUNDAY: For the record, the following is the Costa Rican state-of-play of the Honduran crisis, as of 1400 hours local on June 28. The Costa Rican portion of this story unfolded at 0818 hours local, when an Honduran military aircraft unceremoniously deposited the pajama-clad Zelaya at San Jose's Juan Santamaria International Airport, then returned immediately to Honduras. Senior MFA officials, including VM Edgard Ugalde and Chief of Protocol Javier Sancho, scrambled to meet Zelaya. The local ambassadors from Nicaragua and Venezuela, and the Cuban Consul General soon joined them, with President Arias following shortly after. The small operations center for the GOCCR's police air unit became Zelaya's base. Borrowing cell phones, he as able to take calls from regional leaders including Presidents Chavez, Ortega and Funes, as well as from A/S Shannon. Shannon also spoke with FM Bruno Stagno (already in Managua for the SICA preparations). The Embassy facilitated the Shannon calls.

[1](#)3. A KIDNAPPING, NOT ASYLUM: At a well-attended airport press conference which began at 1120, Zelaya said he had been "kidnapped" by "a few ambitious members" of the Honduran military and taken to Costa Rica. He made clear he was not seeking political asylum, but expressed deep gratitude to "Nobel laureate" Arias, and to "democratic" Costa Rica, for accepting him as a "guest." Zelaya reiterated his hope to return soon to Honduras, since he remained the elected president, and he called on all the democracies in the region, especially the United States, to help restore "democratic rights" to the Honduran people. (NOTE: The press conference concluded before the Honduran legislature stripped Zelaya of the presidency.)

[1](#)4. COSTA RICA CONDEMNS COUP: To the media before departing for the airport, and during the press conference, Arias called the events in Honduras a clear coup, or "golpe de

estado," which threatened constitutional democracy in Honduras, and was a blow to democracy in Central America and in the hemisphere. He said that "all Costa Rica" condemns the coup -- a "lamentable regression" for democracy in Latin America -- and he called for swift re-establishment of democratic order in Honduras.

¶5. Arias confirmed that Zelaya had not requested political asylum, but Costa Rica was pleased to offer him "hospitality" in the "Costa Rican tradition." Arias said that he had invited Zelaya to travel with him to the SICA summit in Managua, during which the Honduran situation would be the top agenda item. Arias added that the GOCR was inviting all Rio Group members to attend, in order to give the meeting the broadest base possible. (NOTE: Despite rumors that the BGRV would dispatch an aircraft to fetch Zelaya later on June 28 and take him to Caracas instead of the SICA summit, both Zelaya and Arias reassured the media that they would travel together to Managua on June 29.)

¶6. LOCAL MEDIA TRIES TO STIR TROUBLE: Most of the media peppered Zelaya with questions, but some local outlets, reflecting Tico legalism, hammered the GOCR officials on who had actually cleared Zelaya's military flight to land. Minister of Public Security Janina del Vecchio responded that the aircraft was not armed, and had filed a flight plan following regular civilian routes and therefore did not need special (i.e., legislative) approval to land. Indicative of the importance the GOCR placed on the Zelaya situation (and of explaining and defending the GOCR's response to same), Ministers Rodrigo Arias (Presidency) and Mayi Antillon (Communications) also attended the press conference, with Antillon acting as MC.
BRENNAN